

VOLUNTEERS REMOVE YEARS OF STORM DAMAGE AT GEODE ST. PARK

by Michael Dhar

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DANVILLE - More than twenty pick-up trucks snaked through Geode State Park this Thursday, March 10 as a crew of volunteers helped clean up felled trees.

The roughly 50 volunteers - former autoworkers from the Case tractor plant in Burlington, IA - cleared out a section of woods littered with storm-damaged trees. They also tore through a 10-foot-tall pile of dead trees that had cluttered up the park for years.

"Over the years, when trees came down, we just put them in that pile," said Park Manager Ulf Konig. "It was there when I got here in 2002. It would have taken me a week or two to go get rid of it by myself."

The volunteers took out that pile in about an hour-and-a-half, arriving for their workday at 8:30 in the morning. After a coffee break at ten, they moved to a section of the park hit especially hard by storm damage. By noon, they had filled one dump truck and 17 pickup trucks with firewood, some of which they donated back to the park.



"I thought it would be a good idea to come out here and help the community," said Dave Fraise, who organized the event and encouraged his fellow union members to come. "The state just doesn't have a lot of money, so we thought we'd come out and help. We have the free time."

The volunteers - members of the United Autoworkers Union - had been out of work since November of last year, and enjoyed getting back together at the park, said union chapter vice president, Lenny Lawson.

"It's kind of a solidarity thing, getting together to work," he said. "You can really do some good and feel good about helping the community. It's a win-win situation."

Park staff, due to limitations in time and resources, could not have accomplished nearly as much as the volunteers did, Konig said. The autoworkers supplied wood splitters, four-wheel drive pickups and, most importantly, about 100 strong hands sheathed in work gloves and ready to help.

The volunteers, dressed in coveralls, stocking caps, and hunter's jackets, worked with great energy, sawing through felled trees and tossing the pieces back to waiting pickup trucks. Many of them make regular use of the park and wanted to give something back, Fraise said.

"There's a lot of guys here that are hunters or fishers and they come out to the park a lot," he said. "We're more than happy to help out here or at any park nearby."